

# Temporal Morphology, Modality, and Underspecification in Amharic

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## **Abstract**

Previous analyses of Amharic have attributed aspect to the verb stem form. Although the "imperfective" stem does encode imperfective aspect and the "gerundive" stem does encode perfect aspect, the "perfective" stem is used to make the progressive, which by definition has imperfective aspect. I therefore propose that the "perfective" stem is underspecified for aspect.

I also discuss three moods: the prospective, conditional, and counterfactual. I argue that the prospective is primarily a modal marker, although it can have temporal implications. Both the conditional and the counterfactual are marked by dedicated markers and have fixed, fake aspect. Both forms are underspecified for real aspect. Counterfactuals can be further removed from the real world by the marker /noro/ or, in some cases, past tense marking.

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the verbal morphology of Amharic, an Ethio-Semitic language spoken in Ethiopia. Amharic is a morphologically complex, nonconcatenative language.

This thesis seeks to give an overview of tense, aspect, and modality in Amharic, and their complex interaction. Both tense and aspect have previously been studied (Leslau, 1995; Demeke & Meyer, 2001; Demeke, 2003; Yimam, 2006); modality, however, has barely been covered.

In this thesis, I argue that the so-called "perfective" stem (P-stem) of Amharic verbs is underspecified for aspect but that the so-called "imperfective" stem (I-stem) is specified for imperfective aspect. I also show that the so-called "gerundive" stem (G-stem) does, in fact, exist, and is specified for perfect aspect.

In addition to examining stem forms, I also investigate modal prefixes. I show that the prospective /l-/ form is primarily modal, although it does affect tense. I also show that both the conditional /k-/ form and the counterfactual /b-/ form have fixed, "fake" aspect that is unexplained in the current literature on counterfactuals.

Section 2 provides necessary background on tense, aspect, and modality. Section 2.3 explains the nonconcatenative stem formation of Amharic.

Section 3 addresses tense and aspect in Amharic, starting with the binary distinction between past and nonpast tense in section 3.1. Tense is shown to be marked by tensed auxiliaries. Section 3.2 discusses the conventional analysis of aspect being encoded in the basic stem form of the verb, how this analysis is problematic, and suggests that the "perfective" stem (P-stem) is not actually marked for aspect.

Section 4 describes the modality distinctions of Amharic, focusing on the prospective, conditional, and counterfactual conditional. Section 4.1 shows the prospective to be primarily modal. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 describe plain conditionals and counter-

factual conditionals and argue that aspect is fixed in both.

Section 5 is the conclusion and summarizes the major points of this thesis, as well as identifying major areas for further study.

All of the data in this paper is from my elicitations during September 2012-April 2013 in conjunction with LING 8105 and LING 8106 at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. I worked with two different consultants, both native speakers of Amharic who grew up in Ethiopia. I used a variety of direct elicitation techniques, including translation, back translation, and grammaticality judgments. In general, judgments were consistent across speakers.<sup>1 2</sup>

## 2 Background

Before considering data from Amharic, I will establish my working assumptions on tense, aspect, and modality. It is also necessary to understand the nonconcatenative morphology of Amharic verbal stems.

### 2.1 Tense and Aspect

Tense and aspect both relate to temporal qualities of the information expressed in a clause. Tense relates the time being talked about in the clause (topic time) to the speech time (moment of utterance) (Klein, 1994).

- (1) **Time of Utterance(TU):** The moment in time when the clause is uttered, usually the present. Also called "speech time."
- (2) **Topic Time(TT):** The moment in time which the sentence concerns, that is, the time about which the speaker is speaking.

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<sup>1</sup>This paper uses the following transcriptions: [j] is the palatal glide, [ʃ] and [ʒ], are the alveolar fricatives, [tʃ] and [dʒ] are the palatal-alveolar affricates, [ä] is the low front vowel, [ɪ] is the reduced mid vowel, [a] is the low back vowel. Ejectives are denoted by [ʼ].

<sup>2</sup>Abbreviations used: AUX - auxiliary, CF - counterfactual, CND - conditional, COMP - complementizer, DEF - definite, EXIST - existential auxiliary, GER - G-stem ("gerundive"), HAB - habitual, IF - /noroo/, INF - infinitive, IPV - I-stem ("imperfective"), ITER - iterative, NEG - negative, NPST - nonpast tense, OBJ - object, OBL - oblique, PF - perfect, PV - P-stem ("perfective"), PRES - present, PROG - progressive, PRS - prospective, PST - past tense, SIM - simultaneity,

For example, past tense indicates that the topic time precedes the speech time. Similarly, future tense indicates that the topic time is chronologically after the moment of utterance. Three common tenses are defined here (Klein, 1994):

- (3) **Past tense:**  $TT < TU$
- (4) **Present tense:**  $TT \supseteq TU$
- (5) **Future tense:**  $TT > TU$

English distinguishes past/present/future:

- (6) "Samuel played in the snow."  
*The topic time is when Samuel plays in the snow. The speech time is now. This sentence is past tense because the topic time is chronologically before the speech time.*
- (7) "Sara is skiing."  
*The topic time is when Sara is skiing. The speech time is now. This sentence is present because the topic time and speech time are the same--right now.*
- (8) "Marta will eat chicken."  
*The topic time is when Marta eats chicken. The speech time is now. This sentence is future tense because the topic time is chronologically after the speech time.*

Other languages have other tense distinctions, for example only past/non-past. Divisions can also be more specific; for example, distinctions can be made between the distant past, somewhat distant past, and recent past (Payne, 1997).

While tense locates the topic time with reference to the speech time, aspect refers to the internal temporal shape of the situation expressed in the clause by relating the topic time to the situation time (Payne, 1997, 238).

- (9) **Situation time (TSit):** The moment in time when the event expressed by the verb took place. Also called "event time."

Three common aspects are defined here (Klein, 1994):

- (10) **Imperfective aspect:**  $TT \subseteq TSit$
- (11) **Perfective aspect:**  $TT \supseteq TSit$



- (12) **Perfect aspect:** TT > TSit

Imperfective aspect views the situation as an incomplete, ongoing process, by making the topic time a subset of the situation time. Perfective aspect views the situation as a complete whole, independent of tense, by making the topic time a superset of the situation time. Essentially, the imperfective takes the internal perspective, and the perfective takes the external perspective (Comrie, 1976; Payne, 1997).

The third aspectual category, the perfect, makes the topic time greater than the situation time. It "describes a currently relevant state brought about by the situation (normally an event) expressed by the verb" (Payne, 1997, 239).

In prose, these definitions look like this:

- (13) **Perfective Aspect:** The situation is viewed in its entirety, without explicit reference to its internal temporal structure (Payne, 1997; Comrie, 1976)
- (14) **Imperfective Aspect:** The situation is viewed as frIPV:om the inside, often as an ongoing process (Payne, 1997; Comrie, 1976).
- a. **Habitual Aspect:** An imperfective aspect where the situation is an event that regularly takes place (Payne, 1997; Comrie, 1976).
  - b. **Progressive Aspect:** An imperfective aspect where the situation is an ongoing, dynamic process (Payne, 1997; Comrie, 1976).
- (15) **Perfect Aspect:** The situation is viewed as being related to a currently relevant state (Payne, 1997; Comrie, 1976).

English examples of aspect:

- (16) "Samuel played in the snow."  
*This is perfective aspect because the situation is viewed as a whole. It is also past tense.*
- (17) "Samuel is playing in the snow."  
*This is imperfective (progressive) aspect because the situation is viewed as ongoing, that is, from within the event. It is also present tense.*
- (18) "Samuel writes letters."  
*This is imperfective (habitual) aspect because the situation is viewed from within as a regular occurrence. It is also present tense.*
- (19) "Samuel has written a letter."  
*This is perfect aspect because the event (writing a letter) is viewed as currently relevant to right now. It is also present tense.*

Like tense, aspect has different distinctions in different languages. For example, some languages, like English, have different forms for habitual and progressive aspect, while others use the same form (Payne, 1997).

In Amharic, tense and aspect are closely related. Although section 3.1 deals mostly with tense, section 3.2 deals with both.

## 2.2 Modality

Rather than referring directly to any characteristics of the event, modality expresses the status of the proposition describing the event (Palmer, 2001, 1). Modality typically denotes either the truth value of the proposition or either the speaker's or subject's attitude towards the proposition (Bybee et al., 1994; Payne, 1997).

Common types of modality include **realis** mood, which asserts that the event has actually happened, and **irrealis** mood, which does not necessarily claim that an event is actual (Palmer, 2001; Payne, 1997).<sup>3</sup> More specific concepts expressed by modality include obligation, permission, ability, assumption, or speculation (Palmer, 2001; Payne, 1997).

Examples of modality in English:

- (20) "Marta ate chicken."  
*This is realis because it states that the event (Marta eating chicken) happened-it is real. It also has past tense and perfective aspect.*
- (21) "Marta could have eaten chicken."  
*This is irrealis because it does not claim that the event (Marta eating chicken) happened. Rather, it expresses that Marta had the either the ability, permission, or opportunity to eat chicken. It also has past tense and perfect aspect.*

This thesis focuses specifically on three irrealis moods in Amharic: the prospective, which indicates an intended event, the conditional, which relates the actuality of one clause to another clause, and the counterfactual, which implies that the clause is false.

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<sup>3</sup>For the purpose of this work, the issue of negatives, futures, and imperatives is not dealt with. Realis is understood to be actual events, while irrealis is understood to be non-actual events.

- (22) "Samuel is going to eat breakfast."  
*This is prospective because it indicates Samuel's intention to eat breakfast.*
- (23) "If Samuel does his homework, he will pass the test."  
*This is conditional because the consequent clause (passing the test) depends on the antecedent clause (Samuel doing his homework) for its reality: if the antecedent is real, then the consequent will also be real.*
- (24) "If Samuel were tall, Marta would like him."  
*This is a counterfactual conditional because it implies (rather than asserting) that Samuel is not tall, and therefore Marta will not like him.*

Modality in Amharic will be discussed in section 4.

## 2.3 Stem Formation

Like other Semitic languages, Amharic verbs are formed from clusters of radicals (i.e. root consonants). There are various types and classes of verbs, including bi-, tri-, quadri-, and pluri-radical roots (Leslau, 1995, 280). This paper deals primarily with tri-radical verbs, for example  $\sqrt{sbr}$  "to break,"  $\sqrt{ggr}$  "to bake,"  $\sqrt{flg}$  "to want," and  $\sqrt{gdl}$  "to kill" (Leslau, 1995). Truncated bi-radical verbs in this paper include  $\sqrt{st'}$ (t) "to give and  $\sqrt{bl}$ (t) "to eat" (Leslau, 1995).

The root radicals are combined with vowels to form the stems from which the surface forms are derived. Tri-radical verbs, the most common variety, are typically divided into types A, B, and C (Leslau, 1995; Demeke, 2003, 322). Some related verbs have the same radicals but are distinguished by their lexical type (Leslau, 1995).

This paper deals primarily with the "perfective," "imperfective," and "gerund" stems. These names come from the canonical analysis of aspect being based on the form that the verb stem takes (Leslau, 1995; Demeke, 2003; Yimam, 2006, 196). Stem forms also exist for the iterative, jussive, and imperative (Demeke, 2003, 322).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Demeke & Meyer (2001) claims that the iterative/repetitive/dramatic stem is made from the I-stem, which makes sense since iteratives are usually associated with imperfective aspect (Bybee et al., 1994). However, unlike other stems, the iterative stem can combine with any kind of verbal morphology, including morphemes that otherwise require a P-stem. Therefore, I consider it to be a distinct stem that either has iterative aspect or no aspect at all.

In Amharic, the iterative has a dramatic meaning. So "to break" becomes "to destroy." See following

Although there is clearly a systematic formation of verb stems, there are some problems with the assuming that aspect is assigned by these stems, which will be discussed in section 3.2. For clarity, this paper uses the terms "P-stem," "I-stem," and "G-stem" to help separate actual aspect from stem types, while still recognizing the established groupings. Glosses mark verbs as "PV," "IPV," or "GER," according to the stem type.

- (30) **P-stem:** The so-called "perfective" verb stem.
- (31) **I-stem:** The so-called "imperfective" verb stem.
- (32) **G-stem:** The so-called "gerundive" verb stem used to make the perfect.

In the following examples, notice the differences in the verb stems, which are made from the root consonants  $\sqrt{\text{sbr}}$ :

- (33) P-STEM:  
**wānbār-u-n sābbār-ätʃ**  
chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>PV</sub>-3F  
"She broke the chair"
- (34) I-STEM:  
**wānbār-u-n ti-sābr-all-itʃ**  
chair-DEF-OBJ 3F-break<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"She breaks the chair"  
"She will break the chair"  
"She breaks chairs (habitually)"

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examples:

- (25) **sara wānbār-otʃ tā-sābabbir-all-itʃ**  
S chair-PL 3F-break<sub>ITER</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"Sara destroys chairs"
- (26) **sara wānbār-u-n li-t-sābabbir nāw**  
S chair-DEF-OBJ PRS-3F-break<sub>ITER</sub> NPST  
"She is going to destroy chairs"
- (27) **[sara wānbār-utʃ bi-t-sābabbir noro] marta tā-naddād nābbār**  
S chair-PL CF-3F-break<sub>ITER</sub> IF M 3F-mad PST  
"If Sara were to destroy chairs, Marta would have been mad"
- (28) **marta wānbār-u-n sābabbir-all-itʃ**  
M chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>ITER</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"Marta has already destroyed the chair"
- (29) **nāgus ijja-sakakkir-all nāw**  
N PROG-drunk<sub>ITER</sub>-EXIST NPST  
"Negus is (always) being (really) drunk"

- (35) G-STEM:  
**wänbär-u-n säbr-a nabbär** <sup>5</sup>  
 chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>GER</sub>-3F PST  
 "(Once there was an incident where) she broke the chair"

"To break" is a tri-radical type A verb, so the P-stem has a geminated second radical, and the I-stem has a singleton second radical. The inflectional forms of tri-radicals are shown in the table in (36). Each of the numerals corresponds to one of the three root consonants.

- (36) *Basic Verbal Inflections of Tri-Radicals*<sup>6</sup>

	Type A	Type B	Type C
P-stem	1ä22ä3-	1ä22ä3-	1a22ä3
I-stem	-1ä23(-)	-1ä22(i)3(-)	-1a22(i)3(-)
G-stem	1ä23ä-	1ä22i3ä-	1a2(2)3ä-

- P-stems have geminate penultimate consonants
- Type A I-stems have a singleton penultimate consonant
- Only type B G-stems have geminate penultimate consonants
- Type C has [a] as the first vowel instead of [ä].
- Type A I-stems do not have an underlying second vowel.

The three types are primarily distinguished by the gemination of the penultimate radical and the inserted vowels (Demeke, 2003, 322).<sup>7</sup> Examples (37) and (38) are both made from I-stems, but they belong to different types. In example (37), made from the radicals √sbr, the second radical is not geminated. In example (38), however, made from the radicals √ggr, the second radical is geminated.

- (37) Type A I-Stem:  
**ti-säbr-a-w-all-itf**  
 3F-break<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ-EXIST-3F  
 "She breaks it"  
 "She will break it"

<sup>5</sup>Here the 3F agreement marker /-a/ replaces the underlying /ä/.

<sup>6</sup>For imperative and jussive forms, see Demeke (2003, 322), on which this table is based.

<sup>7</sup>In surface forms, some vowels may be affected by phonological processes.

- (38) Type C I-Stem:  
**ti-gäggär-äw-all-itʃ**  
 3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ-EXIST-3F  
 "She bakes it"  
 "She will bake it"

Stem types can also be distinguished by agreement affixes: I-stems take agreement prefixes while the other stems take agreement suffixes<sup>8</sup> (Yimam, 2006, 195-197). Note that /-all/, a tense auxiliary discussed in section 3.1.1, always takes agreement suffixes, even when attached to an I-stem verb; these verbs have both an agreement prefix and an agreement suffix, as shown above in examples (37) and (38).

In many cases, the G-stem looks very similar to the I-stem or the P-stem. However, in some situations, such as the truncated bi-radical verb<sup>9</sup> √bl(t) "to eat," there is a clear difference in the G-stem:

- (39) Infinitive:  
**mä-blat**  
 INF-eat  
 "To eat"
- (40) P-Stem:  
**bällä**  
 eat<sub>PV</sub>-3M  
 "He ate"
- (41) I-Stem:  
**ji-bäl-all**  
 3M-eat<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST  
 "He eats"
- (42) G-Stem:  
**bält-o hedä**  
 eat<sub>GER</sub>-3M leave<sub>PV</sub>-3M  
 "Having eaten, he left"

Here, the /t/ from the infinitive is present in the G-stem, but not in the P-stem or I-stem (Demeke, 2003, 325). In addition to sometimes looking different, the G-stem also behaves unlike the other two main stems. Although it often looks like the

<sup>8</sup>This only applies to *agreement* affixes. Both stem types can take derivational prefixes and object agreement suffixes.

<sup>9</sup>See Leslau (1995).

I-stem, it does not take agreement prefixes. More importantly, it usually has perfect aspectual meaning, whereas the I-stem clearly has imperfective aspectual meaning. This will be discussed more fully in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.

This paper uses the nominalized infinitive form marked by /m-/ as the citation form. This form clearly shows the root radicals and functions similarly to the English verbal infinitive, as shown in example (44). Speakers also displayed a willingness to use this as the citation form.

(43)     **mä-sbär**  
           INF-break  
           "To break"

(44)     **sara wänbärun ma-sbär fällig-ätʃ**  
           S       chair-DEF-OBJ INF-break want<sub>PV</sub>-3F  
           "Sara wanted to break the chair"

This form may be the same as the jussive stem (see Demeke (2003)).

## 2.4 Basic Verb Forms

The table in (45) shows the basic forms and meanings of the tri-radical type A verb √sbr "to break." Although this is a transitive verb, object agreement is omitted for clarity. Since third person masculine forms are often unmarked for agreement, this table shows third person feminine forms. The I-stem takes the 3F agreement prefix /t-/, while the other forms take the agreement suffix /-tʃ/. I-stem verbs with the existential auxiliary /-all/ have both subject agreement prefixes and suffixes.

Verbs are categorized according to their base stem form and their status in sentences. "Main verbs" are those that occur as main verbs in the clause. "Dependent Verbs" are those that do not appear as main verbs in main clauses. Some of these appear as the main verb of dependent/embedded clauses, while others usually appear as adjuncts or secondary predicates (Irimia, 2005).

(45) *Basic Verb Forms*

<b>P-stem ("Perfective")</b>		
<i>Main Verbs</i>		
a.	säbbär-ätʃ	"She broke ____"
b.	ijjä-säbbär-ätʃ näw	"She is breaking ____"
c.	ijjä-säbbär-ätʃ näbbär	"She was breaking ____"
<i>Dependent Verbs</i>		
d.	kä-säbbärätʃ	"If she breaks ____"
e.	indi-ti-säbbär	"That she break ____" (embedded verb)
<b>I-stem ("Imperfective")</b>		
<i>Main Verbs</i>		
f.	tä-säbr-all-ätʃ	"She will break ____" "She breaks ____" (habitual)
g.	ti-säbr näbbär	"She used to break ____"
h.	li-t-säbr näw	"She is about to break ____"
i.	li-t-säbr näbbär	"She was about to break ____"
<i>Dependent Verbs</i>		
j.	bi-t-säbir	"If she broke ____" (unlikely)
k.	b-it-säbir noro	"If she had broken ____" (even less likely)
l.	si-ti-säbr	"While she breaks ____"
<b>G-stem ("Gerundive")</b>		
<i>Main Verbs</i>		
m.	säbr-all-ätʃ	"She has broken ____"
n.	säbrä näbbär	"Once she broke ____"
<i>Dependent Verbs</i>		
o.	säbrä	"Having broken ____" (completive)

Although not exhaustive, this table includes all of the verb forms discussed in this paper.

### 3 Tense and Aspect in Amharic

#### 3.1 Tense

Amharic distinguishes two tenses: past and nonpast (Yimam, 2006; Demeke & Meyer, 2001; Demeke, 2003).



Rather than being marked synthetically (i.e. by morphology or verb inflections), tense is marked by three different auxiliaries (Demeke & Meyer, 2001). The first two indicate nonpast tense; the third indicates past tense:

- (46)      a. all-  
              "exists"  
              b. näw  
                  "is"  
              c. näbbär<sup>10</sup>  
                  "was"

Speaker intuition suggests that /-all/ is a sort of clitic auxiliary that attaches to the verb, whereas /näw/ and /näbbär/ are separate words. Furthermore, /-all/ frequently ellides with vowels in the verb stem and affects the stress placement in the verb, while /näw/ and /näbbär/ do not.

### 3.1.1 The Auxiliary /-all/

As a main verb, /-all/ means "to exist" (Yimam, 2006, 194). Like other main verbs, it takes an agreement marker:

- (47)      **samwīl all-ä**  
              S            exist-3M  
              "Samuel exists"  
              "Samuel is here" <sup>11</sup>
- (48)      **sara all-ätʃ**  
              S            exist-3F  
              "Sara exists"  
              "Sara is here"

The main verb /all/ can be combined with auxiliaries, like any other verb:

- (49)      **sara allo    näbbär**  
              S            exist<sub>GER</sub> PST  
              "Sara has been here"

<sup>10</sup>One consultant (S.A.) typically pronounced this as /näbbärä/, a dialectal variation.

<sup>11</sup>This can also mean "Samuel is fine." The same applies to (48).

When used as an auxiliary, /all/ establishes the statement as non-past. In this paper, it is glossed as an existential auxiliary. The auxiliary /all/ is typically followed by subject agreement markers, as shown in examples (50) and (51).

- (50) **marta zant'älla tä-sät'-at-all-itʃ**  
M umbrella 3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF-EXIST-3F  
"Marta will give her an umbrella"  
"Marta gives her an umbrella"
- (51) **äni zant'älla ä-sät'-at-all-ahu**  
I umbrella 1-SGgive<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF-EXIST-1SG  
"I have already given her an umbrella"

Further evidence for /-all/ as an existential auxiliary comes from its absence in negative constructions, such as example (52), which is the negative equivalent of (50). Since this situation does not exist, the appearance of the existential auxiliary would be unexpected.

- (52) **marta zant'älla a-t-sät'-at-im**  
M umbrella NEG-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ-NEG  
"Marta will not give her an umbrella"

Furthermore, the auxiliary /-all/ only appears in nonpast situations, never in past tense situations.

### 3.1.2 The Auxiliaries /näw/ and /näbbär/

The verbs /näw/ and /näbbär/ are verbs meaning "is" and "was." They can be used as auxiliaries or copulative verbs, as shown in examples (53) and (54). As copulatives, they conjugate to agree with the subject:

- (53) **samwil rädʒdʒim nä-w**  
S tall is-3M  
"Samuel is tall"
- (54) **samwil rädʒdʒim näbbär**  
S tall was-3M  
"Samuel was tall"

- (55) **sara rädʒdʒim nä-tʃ**  
 S tall is-3F  
 "Sara is tall"
- (56) **sara rädʒdʒim näbbär-ätʃ**  
 S tall was-3F  
 "Sara was tall"

As auxiliaries, they always take the 3M object agreement suffix by default (Yimam, 2006, 196). This sets them apart from /-all/, which always takes subject agreement suffixes.

- (57) **marta ʒant'älla sät'at näbbär**  
 M umbrella give<sub>GER</sub>-OBJF PST  
 "Marta gave her an umbrella"

When /näw/ and /näbbär/ are conjugated main verbs, they are glossed as "is" and "was" in this paper. As auxiliaries, they are glossed as "PST" and "NPST." Unlike the existential auxiliary /-all/, both /näw/ and /näbbär/ can appear in negative situations:

- (58) **negus wänbär-u-n al-säbbär-o-w-im näbbär**  
 N chair-DEF-OBJ NEG-break<sub>GER</sub>-3M-OBJM-NEG PST  
 "Negus did not break the chair"

Auxiliaries do not stack; only one appears in each clause:

- (59) \* **marta ʒant'älla sät'-at-all-itʃ näbbär**  
 M umbrella give<sub>GER</sub>-EXIST-OBJ NPST

Every main verb construction has exactly one tensed auxiliary, whether that be the existential /-all/, the nonpast /näw/ or the past /näbbär/. The only exception to this is the bare P-stem verb, described below. ✓

### 3.1.3 The Bare P-Stem Verb and Tense

Only one main verb form occurs without a tensed auxiliary, the bare P-stem verb:

- (60) **marta dabbo gaggär-ätʃ**  
 M bread bake<sub>PV</sub>-3F  
 "Marta baked bread"

Sentences such as (60) have resulted in conclusions that the P-stem encodes past tense. However, it cannot be the verb stem itself that marks past tense, based on examples (61) and (62):

(61) **marta dabbo ijjä-gaggär-ätʃ nāw**

M bread PROG-bake<sub>PV-3F</sub> NPST  
 "Marta is baking bread"

(62) **marta dabbo ijjä-gaggär-ätʃ näbbär**

M bread PROG-bake<sub>PV-3F</sub> PST  
 "Marta was baking bread"

Here it is evident that the progressive is formed from the P-stem, and it is the auxiliary that determines the tense; since the same verb can be used in both past and non-past sentences, it is not possible for the tense to be marked in the stem. Rather, the progressive is constructed using the P-stem and then the tense is determined by the auxiliary (Demeke & Meyer, 2001). For other examples of the perfective being used in nonpast situations, see Demeke (2003, 100-103).

According to Demeke & Meyer (2001) and Demeke (2003), past tense is a secondary meaning in this form, an "abstract feature" that is not concretely marked but still abstractly implied. Thus, the bare P-stem can take past tense meaning without any tense markers, as an inferred meaning (Demeke, 2003, 98, 101). Similarly, the P-stem is required for the embedded verb form in (63):

(63) **sara [marta wänbär-u-n indi-ti-säbbär] tä-fällig-all-itʃ**

S M chair-DEF-OBJ CMP-3F-break<sub>PV</sub> 3F-want<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "Sara wants Marta to break the chair"

(64) **sara [marta wänbär-u-n indi-ti-säbbär] fällig-ätʃ**

S M chair-DEF-OBJ CMP-3F-break<sub>PV</sub> want<sub>PV-3F</sub>  
 "Sara wanted Marta to break the chair"

Here the embedded verb has no marked tense, and the main clause can have either past or nonpast tense (Demeke, 2003, 100-103). The use of P-stem verbs in nonpast situations demonstrates that past tense meaning is not encoded in the stem.

All other main verb forms must appear with a tensed auxiliary, so the bare P-stem verb is an exception.

### 3.1.4 Future Tense?

Some previous analyses have found a future tense in Amharic: the prospective verb marked by /l-/, which is often used to express future situations (Demeke & Meyer, 2001).

- (65)     **marta ʒant'älla li-t-sät'-at     näw**  
           M        umbrella    PRS-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ NPST  
           "Marta is about to give her an umbrella"  
           "Marta will give her an umbrella"

Although this form has future meaning, it has strong modal meanings that will be discussed in section 4.1. It also implies an immediate future, and cannot be used for situations in the distant future.

Further support for the absence of a dedicated future tense comes from the usage of the nonpast imperfective for both present and future tense:

- (66)     **marta ʒant'älla tä-sät'-at-all-itʃ**  
           M        umbrella    3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ-EXIST-3F  
           "Marta will give her an umbrella"  
           "Marta gives her an umbrella"

Examples such as (66) show that future tense can be expressed by the nonpast imperfective. Although the prospective carries future meaning, it primarily denotes intention and potentiality, both of which are modal categories (Palmer, 2001). There is therefore no dedicated future tense in Amharic, but rather a modal that suggests future tense.

### 3.1.5 Summary of Tense

Amharic has a binary distinction between past and nonpast tense, which is marked by three auxiliaries: (1) /-all/, an existential auxiliary used to mark nonpast tense

that attaches directly to positive main verbs and takes agreement suffixes, (2) /näw/, an nonpast auxiliary that does not take agreement affixes, and (3) /näbbär/ a past auxiliary that does not take agreement affixes. All main verb forms, except for the bare P-stem verb, must occur with a tensed auxiliary.

## 3.2 Aspect

As mentioned in section 2.3, verbs have canonically been classified as having either perfective or imperfective aspect based on the form that the verb stem takes (Leslau, 1995; Demeke, 2003; Yimam, 2006, 196). This is similar to other Semitic languages.

Although there is clearly a systematic formation of verb stems, not all of the verb stems encode aspect. The I-stem does encode imperfective aspect and the G-stem does encode perfect aspect, but the P-stem does not always encode perfective aspect.

### 3.2.1 The I-Stem and Imperfective Aspect

All of the verbs made from the I-stem have imperfective aspect.<sup>12</sup> The nonpast I-stem verb can convey either general **nonpast imperfective** meaning or **habitual** meaning. A subtype of the imperfective, cross-linguistically the habitual can be either be the same form as the general imperfective, like in Amharic, or a distinct morphological form (Comrie, 1976).

- (67) NONPAST IMPERFECTIVE:  
**sara wänbär-u-n ti-säbr-all-itf**  
 S chair-DEF-OBJ 3F-break<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "Sara breaks the chair"  
 "Sara will break the chair"  
 "Sara breaks chairs (habitually)"

The past I-stem verb conveys a **past imperfective** or **past habitual**:

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<sup>12</sup>Except the counterfactual, which is underspecified for aspect and will be explained in section 4.3.

- (68) PAST IMPERFECTIVE:  
**wänbär-u-n ti-säbr näbbär**  
 chair-DEF-OBJ 3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "She used to break chairs"

The **prospective**, which is made from the I-stem, also has imperfective aspect in Amharic.<sup>13</sup>

- (69) PROSPECTIVE:  
**sara wänbär-u-n li-t-säbr näw**  
 S chair-DEF-OBJ PRS-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> NPST  
 "Sara is about to break a chair"  
 "Sara is going to break a chair"  
 "Sara intends to break a chair"

The I-stem also forms the embedded verb form expressing a **simultaneous** secondary predicate:

- (70) SIMULTANEITY:  
**sara tä-met'-all-itʃ [marta wänbär-u-n si-ti-säbr]**  
 S 3F-come<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F M chair-DEF-OBJ SIM-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub>  
 "Sara will come (at the moment) when Marta breaks the chair"

Unlike general embedded clauses (see example 77), this form is clearly imperfective because it conveys that the subordinate clause happened at the same time as the main clause; the subordinate clause explicitly references the internal temporal structure, and thus is categorized as having imperfective aspect (Comrie, 1976, 24).

The **counterfactual** verb is also made from the I-stem. However, the counterfactual aspectual marking may not contribute its standard aspectual meaning, as discussed in section 4.3.

- (71) COUNTERFACTUAL:  
**[marta wänbär-u-n bi-t-säbir noro] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CF-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> IF S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If Marta had broken the chair, Sara would be mad"

As shown, all of the I-stem verbs carry imperfective aspect. Thus, it is reasonable to uphold the traditional analysis that the I-stem encodes imperfective aspect (Leslau, 1995; Demeke & Meyer, 2001; Demeke, 2003; Yimam, 2006).

<sup>13</sup>See section 4.1.

### 3.2.2 The G-Stem and Aspect

The G-stem is associated with perfect aspect (Demeke, 2003), which refers to a past state that is still currently relevant (Comrie, 1976; Payne, 1997). It can be the main predicate when it appears with a tense auxiliary:

- (72) PRESENT PERFECT:  
**sara wānbār-u-n säbr-all-ätʃ**  
Sara chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>GER</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"Sara has (already) broken the chair"
- (73) PAST PERFECT:  
**sara wānbār-u-n säbr-a nābbār**  
Sara chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>GER</sub>-3F WAS  
"There was an incident where Sara broke the chair"

The G-stem can also appear as an adjunct to another verb. Yimam (2006) calls this the "completive":

- (74) COMPLETIVE:  
**wānbār-u-n säbrä hed-itʃ**  
chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>GER</sub> leave<sub>PV</sub>-3F  
"She broke the chair (and) left"  
"Having broken the chair, she left"

The perfect cannot appear by itself. It must appear with an auxiliary or a main verb.

- (75) \* **sara wānbār-u-n säbrä**  
S chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>GER</sub>

All three of these forms clearly express perfect aspect and I therefore conclude that the G-stem encodes perfect aspect.

### 3.2.3 The P-Stem and Aspect

Verbs made from the P-stem have traditionally been labeled as encoding perfective meaning (Leslau, 1995; Demeke & Meyer, 2001, 145). However, this analysis is problematic since not all verb forms made from the P-stem have perfective aspect.



The **plain P-stem** verb carries perfective meaning, since the situation is treated as a whole without reference to the internal temporal constituency (Comrie, 1976).

- (76) **marta wämbär-u-n säbbär-ätʃ**  
M chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>PV</sub>-3F  
"Marta broke the chair"

The simple **embedded** verb form is made from the P-stem and can be considered to have perfective aspect, since it makes no explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of the event. The complementizing prefix is glossed as "COMP."

- (77) EMBEDDED VERB:  
**sara [marta wämbär-u-n indi-ti-säbbär] tä-fällig-all-itʃ**  
S M chair-DEF-OBJ COMP-3F-break<sub>PV</sub> 3F-want<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"Sara wants Marta to break the chair"
- (78) **sara [marta wämbär-u-n indi-ti-säbbär] tä-fällig näbbär**  
S M chair-DEF-OBJ COMP-3F-break<sub>PV</sub> 3F-want<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
"Sara wanted Marta to break the chair"

The **conditional** is made from the P-stem. It may not have marked aspectual meaning, as is discussed in section 4.2.

- (79) **[marta wämbär-u-n kä-säbbär-ätʃ] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**  
M chair-DEF-OBJ CND-break<sub>PV</sub>-3F S 3F-mad-EXIST-3F  
"If Marta breaks the chair, Sara will be mad"

The **progressive** denotes an action that is in progress and is formed from the P-stem:

- (80) PROGRESSIVE:  
**wämbär-u-n ijjä-säbbär-ätʃ näw**  
chair-DEF-OBJ PROG-break<sub>PV</sub>-3F IS  
"She is breaking the chair"

The progressive, along with the habitual, is defined as being a sub-type of the imperfective because it views the situation as being in progress at the topic time of the sentence, and thus, it has an explicit internal temporal constituency (Comrie, 1976; Payne, 1997; Bybee et al., 1994, 127). Amharic expresses habitual aspect with the I-stem, but progressive aspect with the P-stem.

A better analysis would account for the the imperfective aspect of the progressives, even though they are made from the P-stem, which supposedly carries perfective aspect.

#### **3.2.4 The P-Stem as Aspectless**

As shown in the preceding section, some P-stem verbs have perfective aspect, while others (i.e. the progressive) do not. Thus, it makes the most sense to conclude that the P-stem is underspecified for aspect (i.e. aspectless).

According to Comrie (1976), imperfectivity is cross-linguistically more marked than perfectivity. Since imperfectivity is defined as an "explicit reference to the internal temporal constituency," perfectivity can be simply the lack of an explicit reference (Comrie, 1976, 21).

Since imperfective aspect is marked, the underspecification of aspect implies perfective aspect. In other words, the I-stem verbs are clearly marked for imperfective aspect, so any unspecified verb becomes associated with something other than imperfective, namely perfective.

The bare P-stem verb is unspecified for tense, but has a past tense reading. Similarly, the P-stem is unspecified for aspect, but it acquires a default perfective meaning.

Since the P-stem is aspectless, aspect can be specified by adding another morpheme. For example, adding the progressive prefix to the P-stem gives it progressive aspect, which is a type of imperfective aspect.

#### **3.2.5 Summary of Aspect**

Aspect is associated with the basic stem form. The I-stem encodes imperfective aspect and the G-stem encodes perfect aspect. The P-stem, however, is unspecified for aspect, and receives a default perfective interpretation unless another aspectual marker, such as the progressive prefix, is present.

## 4 Modality in Amharic

In Amharic, modality is marked by verbal prefixes. Realis is unmarked. Modal prefixes do not stack; any given verb has only one mood. This section will focus on three common types of modality: the prospective, the conditional, and the counterfactual conditional.

(81) PROSPECTIVE:

**sara wänbär-u-n li-t-säbr näw**

S chair-DEF-OBJ PRS-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> NPST

"Sara is about to break a chair"

"Sara intends to break a chair"

(82) CONDITIONAL:

**[marta wänbär-u-n kä-säbbär-ätʃ] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**

M chair-DEF-OBJ CND-break<sub>PV</sub>-3F S 3F-mad-EXIST-3F

"If Marta breaks the chair, Sara will be mad"

(83) COUNTERFACTUAL:

**[marta wänbär-u-n bi-t-säbir noro] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**

M chair-DEF-OBJ CF-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> IF S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F

"If Marta were to break the chair, Sara would be mad"

The prospective and counterfactual are both made from the I-stem; the conditional is made from the P-stem.

### 4.1 The Prospective

The prospective, which was briefly mentioned in section 3.1.4, denotes an intended event. It establishes the relationships between a "state at one time and a situation at an earlier time" (Comrie, 1976, 64). A prospective looks ahead to an event that is chronologically future with respect to the topic time; It always looks ahead to a future event, but it can be anchored at any time with respect to speech time.

Although in many languages the prospective is connected to perfect aspect, there is not necessarily a direct correspondence between perfect/perfective meaning and prospective meaning (Comrie, 1976, 64). In Amharic, prospectives are made from the I-stem, which consistently encodes imperfective aspect.

Amharic marks prospectives with the verbal prefix /l-/. Like other modal prefixes, it always attaches to the highest (leftmost) place on the verb. The prospective is made from the I-stem and therefore takes agreement prefixes (Yimam, 2006).

- (84) **[marta ʒant'älla li-t-sät'-at nāw]**  
 M umbrella PRS-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ PRES  
 "Marta is about to give her an umbrella"

- (85) **marta ʒant'älla li-t-sät'-at näbbär**  
 M umbrella PRS-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ PST  
 "Marta was about to give her an umbrella"

The prospective implies imminency: the future event is about to take place. That means that a prospective cannot usually be used to refer to the distant future, which is why some previous works have labeled it an imminent future tense (cf Demeke & Meyer, 2001). According to speaker intuition, a construction like (86) is only grammatical if Marta breaks a chair immediately upon receiving her failing grade.

- (86) **[marta wädk'a bi-hon] wänbär-u-n li-t-sabir nāw**  
 M fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become chair-DEF-OBJ PRS-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> NPST  
 "If Marta had failed (the test), she'd be going to break a chair (in the imminent future)"

The prospective is flexible with regards to tense. The topic time of a past tense prospective can be either past or future; either Marta intended to bake yesterday, or she intended to bake tomorrow but changed her plans. It is the intention, not necessarily the event, that is in the past:

- (87) **tälantinna marta li-t-gaggär näbbär**  
 yesterday M PRS-3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "Marta was going to bake yesterday"

- (88) **näga marta li-t-gaggär näbbär**  
 tomorrow M PRS-3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "Marta was going to bake tomorrow"

The prospective form appears in many of the same constructions as the infinitive /mä-/ form, but, according to native speakers, it is less certain. It expresses more of a possibility rather than a fact.

For example, when constructing statements about obligation, the infinitive creates a stronger sense of obligation. The sense of obligation in example (89) is much stronger than in example (90).

- (89) **marta me-zfin ji-gab-at-all** <sup>14</sup>  
M INF-sing 3M-ought<sub>IPV</sub>-3F-EXIST  
"Marta is obligated to sing"
- (90) **marta li-t-zäfin ji-gab-at-all**  
M PRS-3F-sing 3M-ought<sub>IPV</sub>-3F-IPV  
"Marta should sing"

Speaker intuition interprets a strong sense of obligation in (89); Marta is utterly obligated to sing. While she is also obligated to sing in (90), it is less strongly expressed.

The prospective always makes the proposition less certain. In obligation constructions, it weakens the sense of obligation, sounding less authoritative and more polite.

Affecting the certainty of a proposition is a clearly modal property. The verb may happen, but it is still only an intention, not a reality.

The prospective can also be interpreted as a sort of epistemic/potential marker, as in example (91). This further solidifies its status as a primarily modal marker.

- (91) **marta doro wät' li-t-bäla t-itfil-all-itf**  
M chicken stew PRS-3F-eat<sub>IPV</sub> 3F-able<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"Marta may be eating chicken stew" (today/tomorrow)  
"Marta may have been eating chicken stew (yesterday)"

Here it expresses the epistemic speculation/deduction that Marta was potentially eating chicken stew; the speaker does not know. Example (91) can be used for either past or non-past situations. The potential meaning of the prospective can also be negated:

- (92) **marta pom l-a-j-nor-at ji-tfil-all**  
M apple PRS-NEG-3M-be<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF 3M-able<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST  
"Marta probably doesn't have an apple"

<sup>14</sup>The verb "ought" uses object agreement for the subject and then fills the empty prefix agreement slot with the default 3SGM /j-/. It means something like "It is necessary that Marta sing" or "It is required of Marta that she sing."

The prospective cannot grammatically appear by itself. It must appear with either an auxiliary such as /näbbär/ or another verb, such as in example (91).

(93) \***marta ʒant'älla li-t-sät'-at**

The prospective can also be negated. Notice that the prospective marker attaches to a higher position (i.e. leftmost) than the negative prefix.

(94) **marta ʒant'älla l-a-t-sät'-at      näbbär**  
M      umbrella      PRS-NEG-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ PST  
"Marta was not about to give her an umbrella"  
PST/FUT

(95) **marta doro wät' l-a-t-bäla      t-itʃil-all-itʃ**  
M      chicken stew      PRS-NEG-3F-eat<sub>IPV</sub> 3F-able<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"Marta might not be eating chicken stew"

The prospective can appear in a single clause or in either clause of a conditional. In (96) it appears in the subordinated clause.

(96) **marija si-t'-mät'a [marta pom li-t-bäla si-t-i! näw]**  
M      S-3F-come<sub>IPV</sub> M      apple PRS-3F-eat<sub>IPV</sub> SIM-3F-? NPST  
"Maria will come when Marta is about to eat an apple"

The prospective denotes an intended, imminent event, much like the English "going to" construction. By nature, it is usually oriented to a future event, which means it can be used for many immediate future events. It can also refer to past intentions, or future intentions that have been canceled.

## 4.2 The Conditional

A conditional is a two-clause construction where the main clause (i.e. the consequent) depends on the dependent clause (i.e. the antecedent) for its validity. If the antecedent is true, then the consequent will also be true.

(97) **If Sara bakes bread, then I will eat it.**  
ANTECEDENT                      CONSEQUENT

A plain conditional has no notable implications as to the likelihood of the propositions coming true. Rather, it simply connects two events in a causation relationship.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Description

Amharic marks simple conditionals with the verbal prefix /k-/. The morpheme is the same for all persons and numbers and, like the other modal prefixes, always attaches to the highest (leftmost) place on the verb. The conditional is made using the P-stem, and like other verbs made from the perfective stem, takes agreement suffixes (Yimam, 2006). The morphology of a typical conditional construction is shown in (98).

(98) *Conditional Morphology:*

ANTECEDENT	CONSEQUENT
<b>k-(al-)säbbär-itʃ</b> CND-(NEG)-break <sub>PV</sub> -3F	NONPAST IMPERFECTIVE: <b>tä-naddäd-all-itʃ</b>
	PAST IMPERFECTIVE: <b>tä-naddäd näbbär</b>

The conditional verb appears in the antecedent of a two-clause conditional. The consequent can have one of two verbs, either the nonpast or past imperfective. Conditionals typically look like examples (99) or (100).

(99) **[sara dabbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätʃ] tä-gaggär-all-itʃ**  
S bread INF-bake COND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F 3F-BAKE<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
"If Sara wants to bake bread, then she will bake"

(100) **[sara dabbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätʃ] tä-gaggär näbbär**  
S bread INF-bread CND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F 3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> WAS  
"If Sara wanted to bake bread, then she baked" <sup>16</sup>

The conditional marker only appears on the antecedent verb of a conditional construction; it cannot appear in a single clause. See example (101). It also cannot appear with /noro/, unlike the counterfactual marker (see section 4.3).

<sup>15</sup>Note that counterfactual conditionals affect the likelihood of the antecedent being true, not the likelihood of the antecedent resulting in the consequent (Iatridou, 2000).

<sup>16</sup>Although this form is grammatical for past situations, the counterfactual is preferred. See discussion of example (108).

(101) \***marta doro wät' kábällaŋ**  
*FRAGMENT*

(102) \***marta doro wät' kábällaŋ noro**  
*FRAGMENT*

The conditional /k-/ can be combined with a negative marker, as shown in examples (103) and (104). Like other subordinate verbs, the conditional verb takes the negative prefix /al-/ , but the negative complement suffix /-m/ is optional. Both negative affixes are required on main verbs, as shown in the consequent of (104). The non-conditional main verb in the consequent takes both affixes.

(103) **[nägä ts'ahai kä-honai] sara tä-rammid-all-itŋ**  
 tomorrow sun CND-become<sub>PV</sub> S 3F-walk<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If tomorrow is sunny, Sara will go walking"

(104) **[nägä ts'ahai k-al-honai] sara al-tä-rammid-im**  
 tomorrow sun CND-NEG-become<sub>PV</sub> S NEG-3F-walk<sub>IPV</sub>-NEG  
 "If tomorrow is not sunny, Sara will not go walking"

The presence of the optional suffix /-m/ on the antecedent verb changes the meaning of the conditional:

(105) **[dorow k-al-faggätä] nägus näga ji-bäl-aw-all**  
 chicken CND-NEG-mold<sub>PV</sub> N tomorrow 3M-eat<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJM-ALL  
 'If the chicken didn't get moldy, Negus will eat it tomorrow'

(106) **[dorow k-al-faggät-im] ji-bäl-aw-all**  
 chicken CND-NEG-mold<sub>PV</sub>-NEG 3M-eat<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJM-ALL  
 'Even if the chicken gets moldy, he'll eat it'

The conditional can take past tense meaning for past tense situations, but only for situations where the outcome is unknown. If the antecedent has happened and the speaker knows the outcome, the counterfactual is preferred.

(107) **[sara däbbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätŋ] tä-gaggär-all-itŋ**  
 S bread INF-bake CND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F 3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If she wants to bake bread (e.g. tomorrow), then she will bake"

(108) **[sara däbbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätŋ] tä-gaggär näbbär**  
 S bread INF-bread CND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F 3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "If she wanted to bake bread, then she baked"



Both nonpast and past conditionals can be negated:

- (109) **[marta ʒant'älla li-t-sät'-at k-al-fällig-itʃ] a-t-sät'-at-im**  
 M umbrella PRS-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ CND-NEG-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F NEG-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF-NEG  
 "If Marta doesn't want to give her an umbrella, then she won't give to her"
- (110) **[marta ʒant'älla li-t-sät'-at k-al-fällig-itʃ] a-t-sät'-at-im näbbär**  
 M umbrella PRS-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJ CND-NEG-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F NEG-3F-give<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF-NEG WAS  
 "If Marta hadn't wanted to give her an umbrella, then she didn't give to her"

In general, conditionals are open-ended. They are typically used for future situations, which may or may not happen. When used in past-tense situations, they refer to unknown situations. When the speaker knows the outcome of the event, speaker intuition prefers a counterfactual; the usage of a past conditional like (110) implies that the speaker does not know whether or not Marta wanted to give away any umbrellas.

#### 4.2.2 Tense in Conditionals

Tense is only marked in the consequent and the antecedent is underspecified for tense. The morphology of the antecedent does not change between the nonpast and past conditionals:

- (111) NONPAST CONDITIONAL:  
**[marta wänbär-u-n kä-säbbär-ätʃ] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CND-break<sub>PV</sub>-3F S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If Marta breaks the chair, Sara will be mad"  
 "If Marta broke the chair, Sara will be mad"
- (112) PAST CONDITIONAL:  
**[marta wänbär-u-n kä-säbbär-ätʃ] sara tä-naddäd näbbär**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CND-break<sub>PV</sub>-3F S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "If Marta broke the chair, Sara was mad"

Since the consequent requires an imperfective verb, nonpast tense is marked by /-all/ and past tense is marked by /näbbär/.

A past tense conditional consequent cannot apply to the future:

- (113) \* **näga kä-wädik'-ätʃ däs aj-lat-im näbbär**  
 tomorrow CF-fail<sub>IPV</sub>-3F happy NEG-be.happy-NEG PST

- (114) **[näga kä-wädik'-ätʃ] däs aj-lat-im**  
 tomorrow CND-fail<sub>PV</sub>-3F happy NEG-be.happy-NEG  
 "If she fails (the test) tomorrow, she will not be happy"

Although it is not marked on the verb, antecedent tense is flexible:

- (115) **[tälantinna kä-t'alä] (näga) nägus bärädo-laj ji-tʃ'awit-all**  
 yesterday CND-fall<sub>PV</sub> tomorrow N snow-in? 3M-play<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST  
 "If it snowed yesterday, Negus will play in the snow tomorrow"

- (116) **[näga kä-t'alä] nägus bärädo-laj ji-tʃ'awit-all**  
 tomorrow CND-fall<sub>PV</sub> N snow-in 3M-play<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST  
 "If it snows tomorrow, Negus will play in the snow"

In example (115), the antecedent is past ("yesterday") but the consequent is future.

In example (116), the antecedent is future ("tomorrow") and the consequent is future.

Besides the time adverbs, the sentences are identical.

Unless otherwise specified, the tense is assumed to be the same in both clauses, so using the same time adverb in both clauses is redundant:

- (117) ? **[tälantinna kä-wädik'-ätʃ] (?tälantinna) däs aj-lat-im näbbär**  
 yesterday CND-fail<sub>PV</sub>-3F yesterday happy NEG-be.happy-NEG PST  
 "If she failed yesterday, she won't be happy yesterday"

It is the tense marked in the consequent that scopes over the entire conditional, unless the time of the antecedent is specified by an adverb.

#### 4.2.3 Aspect in Conditionals

Conditional antecedents are always made from the P-stem. This is fixed; there is no way to build a conditional using the I-stem.

- (118) **[marta wänbär-u-n kä-säbbär-ätʃ] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CND-break<sub>PV</sub>-3F S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If Marta breaks the chair, Sara will be mad"

- (119) \***[marta wänbär-u-n kä-säbr-ätʃ] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CND-break<sub>IPV</sub>-3F S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F

It is not possible to get another type of verb in the antecedent, even one made from the P-stem. Using a progressive requires a work-around:

- (120) **[ijjä-t'alä kä-honä] nägus bärädo-laj ji-tš'awit-all**  
 PROG-fall<sub>PV</sub> CND-become N snow-in? 3M-play<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST  
 "If it were snowing, Negus would be playing in the snow"

I could find no way to stack conditional and progressive prefixes. The antecedent verb is fixed as an P-stem with the conditional prefix.

Similarly, the consequent typically requires an I-stem verb: either the nonpast or past imperfective, as shown in examples (121) and (122):

- (121) **[sara dabbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätš] tä-gaggär-all-itš**  
 S bread INF-bake COND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F 3F-BAKE<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If Sara wants to bake bread, then she will bake"
- (122) **[sara dabbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätš] tä-gaggär näbbär**  
 S bread INF-bread CND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F 3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "If Sara wanted to bake bread, then she baked"

Native speakers usually find other verbs too certain and therefore ungrammatical in a conditional construction.<sup>17</sup> The consequent depends on the antecedent for its validity; unless the antecedent holds, there is no certainty that the consequent will also hold. Example (124) is ungrammatical because the perfective verb in the consequent has already happened, making the conditional nonsensical. The perfect in (125) is also ungrammatical for the same reason.

- (124) \* **[sara dabbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätš] gaggär-ätš**  
 S bread INF-bake CND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F bake<sub>PV</sub>-3F
- (125) \* **[sara dabbo ma-gaggär kä-fällig-ätš] gaggär-all-ätš**  
 S bread INF-bake CND-want<sub>PV</sub>-3F bake<sub>GER</sub>-EXIST-3F

The stem types are fixed for both the antecedent and consequent. Therefore, the aspectual interpretations associated with those stem types are not morphologically realized: because the stem type cannot change, the conditionals cannot derive aspectual meaning from those stems. This is called fake aspect.

<sup>17</sup>Certain situations allow a perfect G-stem verb, although the meaning is a bit different:

- (123) **[näga sara kä-gaggär-ätš] nägus bält-o näbbär**  
 tomorrow S CND-bake<sub>PV</sub>-3F N eat<sub>GER</sub>-3M PST  
 "He would have eaten by now if she was going to cook tomorrow."

- (126) **Fake aspect:** Aspectual morphology that does not contribute its standard aspectual interpretation to the sentence (Iatridou, 2000, 235).<sup>18</sup>

Although the antecedents appear to have perfective morphology and the consequents have imperfective morphology, neither of these markings contributes real aspect to the conditional.<sup>19</sup> The result is a conditional that may have aspectual meaning, but that aspectual meaning is not marked in the morphology.

In order for the aspectual markings to be real, there would need to be at least two possible aspects. Since there is no choice, the aspect must be fake.

#### 4.2.4 Summary of Conditionals

Conditionals are marked by the verbal prefix /k-/ and can be either nonpast or past. Tense is only marked in the consequent and scopes over the entire conditional.

The antecedent requires the P-stem and the consequent requires the I-stem, but these stems do not contribute any aspectual meaning to the conditional; the stem types are fixed so any aspect markings in the morphology are fake.

### 4.3 The Counterfactual

A counterfactual statement (CF) implies that a certain proposition is false, without actually asserting it. Van linden & Verstraete (2008) call this phenomenon a polarity reversal: a positive polarity is marked in the proposition, but a negative polarity is implied. Like negation, counterfactuals convey that the event did not occur. Unlike negation, however, counterfactuals also imply that the event was potential in some way (Van linden & Verstraete, 2008, 1882).

- (127) "If Marta had broken a chair, Sara would have been mad"  
(suggests that Marta had the opportunity to break a chair, but she did not)

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<sup>18</sup>Fake tense also exists, and may be present in certain types of Amharic CFs, but certainly not all of them.

<sup>19</sup>Note that the aspect in conditionals is fake whether or not the P-stem encodes aspect.

- (128) "If Negus were smart, he would pass calculus"  
(suggests that Negus is not smart)

Because counterfactuals imply a certain conclusion rather than asserting it, they can be canceled without being redundant or contradictory (Iatridou, 2000):

- (129) "If it was snowing, Negus would be playing in the snow, and, in fact, it is snowing so Negus is playing in the snow."  
(130) "If it was snowing, Negus would be playing in the snow, but it is not snowing so Negus is not playing in the snow."

Counterfactual conditionals are usually morphologically similar to plain, non-counterfactual conditionals. Most languages mark counterfactuals with either a dedicated CF marker, or with temporal morphology (Iatridou, 2000; Van linden & Verstraete, 2008; Halpert & Bjorkman, 2012). Since the difference in meaning of counterfactuals and conditionals can be attributed to morphology, finding these differences is important for understanding how counterfactuals work (Iatridou, 2000).

#### 4.3.1 Description

Amharic marks counterfactuals with the verbal prefix /b-/. This prefix is the same for all persons and numbers. Like counterfactual markers in other languages, it always attaches to the highest (leftmost) position on the verb (Halpert & Bjorkman, 2012). The counterfactual is made from the I-stem.

The morphology of typical counterfactual constructions is shown in (131).

- (131) *Counterfactual Morphology:*
- | ANTECEDENT   |  | CONSEQUENT  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>b-(al-)t-säbir</b><br>CND-(NEG)-3F-break <sub>IPV</sub> |  | NONPAST IMPERFECTIVE:<br><b>tä-naddäd-all-itʃ</b> |
| <b>b-(al-)t-säbir</b><br>CND-(NEG)-3F-break <sub>IPV</sub> |  | PAST IMPERFECTIVE:<br><b>tä-naddäd näbbär</b>     |
| <b>noro</b><br>IF  |  | NONPAST IMPERFECTIVE:<br><b>tä-naddäd-all-itʃ</b> |
|  |  | PAST IMPERFECTIVE:<br><b>tä-naddäd näbbär</b>     |

Counterfactuals can be made with or without /*noro*/, which will be discussed in section 4.3.4. Tense will be discussed in section 4.3.2. Typical counterfactual conditionals look like example (132):

- (132) **[marta wānbār-utʃ bi-t-säbir noro] sara tä-naddäd näbbär**  
 S chair-PL CF-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> IF s 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "If Marta had broken the chair, Sara would have been mad"

In (132), the speaker expresses a possibility that Marta could have broken a chair; she had the opportunity to break a chair, and she may have almost broken it.<sup>20</sup> However, the CF marker /*b-*/ indicates that this situation, although potential, did not happen. Marta did not break the chair, and therefore Sara is not mad, though she could be mad for an unrelated reason. Thus, the listener interprets the sentence as meaning "Marta did not break the chair, but she could have, and if she had, Sara would be mad."

When used about the future, counterfactuals imply that it is more likely that the antecedent (and therefore the consequent) will *not* come true than that the antecedent will come true ("future less vivids" Iatridou, 2000).

The difference between the plain conditional and the counterfactual conditional can be seen in the meaning:

- (133) PLAIN CONDITIONAL:  
**[[sara si-ti-rot'] marta dabbo kä-gaggär-itʃ] sara däs ji-lat-all**  
 S SIM-3F-run<sub>IPV</sub> M bread CND-bake<sub>PV</sub>-3F S happy 3M-be.happy-EXIST  
 "If, while Sara runs, Marta bakes bread, Sara will be happy"
- (134) COUNTERFACTUAL CONDITIONAL:  
**[[sara si-ti-rot'] marta dabbo bi-ti-gaggär] sara däs ji-lat-all**  
 S SIM-3F-run<sub>IPV</sub> M bread CF-3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> S happy 3M-be.happy-EXIST  
 "If, while Sara ran, Marta were to bake bread, Sara would be happy"

The plain conditional is more open-ended. Marta may or may not bake bread while Sara runs. In the counterfactual, however, it is implied that Marta will not, most likely, bake bread. The contrary-to-fact implications of the counterfactuals is quite strong.

<sup>20</sup>Although, just Marta living in a world with chairs may have been enough potential.

Whenever /b-/ is present, there is a very clear implication that the proposition is not true or even likely to be true, although the speaker may wish it to be so.

- (135) **bä-hed**  
 CF-go<sub>IPV</sub>  
 "If I were to go" = I want to go

- (136) **kä-hed-ku**  
 CND-go<sub>PV</sub>-1SG  
 "If I go" = I don't really care

Counterfactuals can appear on their own to express wishes, but such a construction must be used in context since speakers do not consider the counterfactual wish to be a complete sentence. When /noro/ is used, there is generally a specific reason for the wish that has already been expressed or will be expressed. Here, it is understood that it is not snowing, but that the speaker wants it to snow, perhaps because he does not want to go to school:

- (137) **bärido bi-t'älä**  
 ice CF-fall<sub>IPV</sub>  
 "If (only) it would snow!"  
*Not a complete sentence*

- (138) **bärido bi-t'älä noro**  
 ice CF-fall<sub>IPV</sub> IF  
 "If (only) it would snow!"  
*Not a complete sentence*

Counterfactuals can also express more explicit wishes:

- (139) **nägus bi-säbr-il-iṅ noro**  
 N CF-break<sub>IPV</sub>-OBL-OBJ1SG IF  
 "I want Negus to break it for me"

Like the plain conditional, the counterfactual can be negated. The counterfactual verb only requires the negative prefix, while the consequent verb requires both the negative prefix and suffix. Example (141) is the negative counterpart to example (140).

- (140) **[sara bi-ti-mut noro] doro wät' ji-bäll-u näbbär**  
 S CF-3F-die<sub>IPV</sub> IF chicken stew 3PL-eat<sub>IPV</sub>-3PL PST  
 "If Sara had died, they would have eaten chicken stew"  
 Implication: Sara did not die, so they did not eat chicken stew
- (141) **[sara b-a-ti-mut noro] doro wät' a-j-bäll-um näbbär**  
 S CF-NEG-3F-die<sub>IPV</sub> IF chicken stew NEG-3PL-eat<sub>IPV</sub>-NEG PST  
 "If Sara had not died, they would not have eaten chicken stew"  
 Implication: Sara did die

Counterfactuals can be canceled without sounding redundant or contradictory:

- (142) **[nägus wänbär-u-n bi-säbr-äw noro] marta tä-naddäd näbbär inna**  
 N chair-DEF-OBJ CF-break<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJM IF M 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub> PST and  
**nägus wänbär-u-n säbr-ot-all**  
 N chair-DEF-OBJ break<sub>GER</sub>-??-EXIST  
 "If Negus had broken the chair, Marta would have been mad, and, (in fact) Negus has already broken the chair"
- (143) **[marta zant'älla le-mä-st'ät bi-t-fällig] t-itjil-all-itj gin a-t-fällig-im**  
 M umbrella OBJ-INF-give CF-3F-want<sub>IPV</sub> 3F-able<sub>IPV</sub>-3F but NEG-3F-want<sub>IPV</sub>-NEG  
 "If Marta wanted to give her an umbrella, she could give to her, but she doesn't want to"

This is an established property of counterfactuals and supports the idea that counterfactuality is implied, not asserted (Iatridou, 2000).

#### 4.3.2 Tense in Counterfactuals

Like the plain conditionals, counterfactual conditionals only mark tense in the consequent, although either clause can include time adverbs.

The only difference between examples (144) and (145) is the tense in the consequent:

- (144) NONPAST:  
**[marta wänbär-u-n bi-t-säbir noro] sara tä-naddäd-all-itj**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CF-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> IF S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If Marta were to break the chair, Sara would be mad"
- (145) PAST:  
**[marta wänbär-u-n bi-t-säbir noro] sara tä-naddäd näbbär**  
 M chair-DEF-OBJ CF-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> IF S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "If Marta had broken the chair, Sara would have been mad"



The nonpast counterfactual is interpreted as nonpast tense, while the past counterfactual is usually interpreted as past tense. The past tense counterfactual is understood to be less likely, since the past is unchangeable; an unlikely future event ("future less vivids" Iatridou, 2000) could still happen, but the past cannot be changed once it is known.

Like the conditional, the counterfactual consequent usually requires an I-stem verb, so tense is marked by either /-all/ or /näbbär/.

Tense can be specified in the antecedent by a time adverb. If the time in the consequent is different, a time adverb can appear in the consequent as well:

- (146) **[näga wädk'a bihon noro] däs aj-lat-im**  
 tomorrow fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become IF happy NEG-be.happy-NEG  
 "If she failed (the test) tomorrow, she would not be happy"

- (147) **[tälantinna wädk'a bi-hon] näga däs aj-lat-im**  
 yesterday fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become tomorrow happy NEG-be.happy-NEG  
 "If she had failed (the test) yesterday, she would not be happy tomorrow"

Using the same time adverb in both clauses is redundant, and therefore dispreferred. The antecedent is usually the preferred clause for time adverbs.

- (148) **[tälantinna wädk'a bi-hon] (?tälantinna) däs aj-lat-im**  
 yesterday fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become (yesterday) happy NEG-be.happy-NEG  
 "If she failed (the test) yesterday, she wouldn't be happy"

Past tense counterfactuals cannot usually apply to future situations:

- (149) \* **[näga wädk'a bi-hon] däs aj-lat-im näbbär**  
 tomorrow fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become happy NEG-be.happy-NEG PST

In some situations, the same counterfactual construction can be used for past or nonpast situations; tense in counterfactuals is more connected to reality than to time.<sup>21</sup> This follows Iatridou (2000)'s idea that past tense denotes exclusion from the actual world and not necessarily actual tense.

<sup>21</sup>This may mean there is fake tense in Amharic, as well as the required fake aspect. It might also mean that the auxiliary /-all/ is not as closely associated with time as it appears.

For example, nonpast counterfactuals without /noro/, like (150), can sometimes take either a past or nonpast reading:

- (150) **[nägus wänbär-u-n bi-säbir] sara tä-naddäd-all-itʃ**  
 N chair-DEF-OBJ CF-break<sub>IPV</sub> S 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub>-EXIST-3F  
 "If Negus were going to break the chair, Sara would be mad"  
 "If Negus had broken the chair, Sara would be mad"

Here, both the past and nonpast counterfactual can be used for past tense:

- (151) **[tälantinna wädäk'a bi-hon] näga däs aj-lat-im**  
 yesterday fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become tomorrow happy NEG-be.happy-NEG  
 "If she failed (the test) yesterday, she would not be happy tomorrow"
- (152) **[tälantinna wädäk'a bi-hon] näga däs aj-lat-im näbbär**  
 yesterday fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become tomorrow happy NEG-be.happy-NEG PST  
 "If she did fail (the test) yesterday, she wouldn't be happy tomorrow"

Speaker intuition suggests that there was some chance of her failing in (152), but almost no chance in (151). In both cases, it is understood that she did not fail the test. It is, however, understood to be slightly more likely in the nonpast counterfactual than in the past counterfactual.

Tense appears to be somewhat flexible in counterfactuals. Sometimes it marks actual tense, other times it appears to be used for emphasis. Tense is only marked in the consequent, but either clause can take time adverbs.

### 4.3.3 Aspect in Counterfactuals

Like the conditionals, counterfactuals have fixed aspect. While the conditional requires the aspectless P-stem, the counterfactual requires the imperfective I-stem.

- (153) **[marta wänbär-utʃ bi-t-säbir noro] sara tä-naddäd näbbär**  
 S chair-PL CF-3F-break<sub>IPV</sub> IF s 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub> PST  
 "If Marta had broken the chair, Sara would have been mad"
- (154) \* **[marta wänbär-utʃ bi-t-säbbär noro] sara tä-naddäd näbbär**  
 S chair-PL CF-3F-break<sub>PV</sub> IF s 3F-mad<sub>IPV</sub> PST

Also like the conditional, the consequent typically requires an imperfective I-stem verb.<sup>22</sup>

Since the aspect in counterfactuals is fixed, it is fake aspect and does not contribute any aspectual meaning to the sentence.

In Amharic, counterfactuals are distinguished morphologically from plain conditionals by two things: the counterfactual marker /b-/ (rather than the conditional marker /k-/) and fake imperfective aspect (rather than fake non-imperfective aspect).

It is cross-linguistically common for languages to have real temporal morphology in plain conditionals, but fake temporal morphology in counterfactuals (Iatridou, 2000). However, Amharic has fake aspect in both plain conditionals and counterfactuals. This suggests that counterfactuals can have fake aspect whether or not conditionals have real aspect.

Many languages with fake temporal morphology in counterfactuals also allow real temporal in counterfactuals (Halpert & Bjorkman, 2012). However, there does not seem to be a simple way of adding real aspectual morphology to an Amharic counterfactual, aside from adding secondary predicates or dependent verbs. Both conditionals and counterfactuals remain underspecified for aspect.

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<sup>22</sup>Certain verbs may allow a perfect G-stem verb, although this does not result in a counterfactual reading for all verbs:

- (155) **[näguṣ ink\*oräwrit-u-n bi-gäll-at] täppät-o näbbär**  
 N frog-DEF-OBJ CF-kill<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF sleep<sub>GER</sub>-3M PST  
 "If Negus killed the frog, he would be sleeping (by now)"
- (156) **[samwīl bi-gäll-at noro] näguṣ tänadd-o näbbär**  
 S CF-kill<sub>IPV</sub>-OBJF IF N mad<sub>GER</sub>-3M PST  
 "Negus is mad because Samuel killed her"
- (157) ? **[sara bi-t-gaggär (noro)] näguṣ bält-o näbbär**  
 S CF-3F-bake<sub>IPV</sub> IF N eat<sub>GER</sub>-3M PST  
 "Because he ate, she baked"

#### 4.3.4 /noro/

Counterfactual constructions can occur with or without /noro/. It always appears directly after the verb, at the end of the antecedent clause. It adds an additional layer of unreality to the counterfactual, but is not the main counterfactual marker since it is optional.

/noro/ probably originates from the completive of /menor/ "to live/be." As a completive, /menor/ conjugates for person. In counterfactuals, it always takes the 3M form, like other auxiliaries and constructions in Amharic (cf section 3.1.2).

- (158) **sara äzzi nor-a hajd-itf**  
S here be<sub>GER</sub>-3F left<sub>PV</sub>-3F  
"Sara, having been here, left"  
"Sara lived here, then she moved"

- (159) **näguṣ äzzi nor-o hajd-ä**  
N here be<sub>GER</sub>-3M left<sub>PV</sub>-3M  
"Negus, having been here, left"  
"Negus lived here, then moved"

However, speaker intuition associates /noro/ with "if" more readily than with /menor/ suggesting that it is a well-established grammatical morpheme. The exact syntactic classification of /noro/ is hard to define. It always appears directly after the counterfactual verb, usually as the last word in the clause. Speaker intuition suggests that it is a distinct word.

/noro/ only appears in counterfactual contexts. It is ungrammatical in plain conditionals or other constructions.

In a counterfactual, /noro/ further removes the situation from the realm of reality, acting as second sort of what Iatridou (2000) calls an "exclusion feature"; the CF marker /b/ excludes the statement from the actual world, and /noro/ removes it even further from the actual world.

Both examples (149) and (147) are used in a knowable situation; they are only grammatical if Marta has received a grade for her test and she knows that she did

not fail. If Marta has not received her grade yet and there is still a possibility that she could pass, a plain conditional must be used.

- (160) **[Marta wädk'a bi-hon] däs aj-lat-im näbbär**  
M fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become happy NEG-be.happy-NEG PST  
"If Marta failed, she would not be happy"  
*She did not fail.*

- (161) **[Marta wädk'a bi-hon noro] däs aj-lat-im näbbär**  
fail<sub>GER</sub> CF-become IF happy NEG-be.happy-NEG PST  
"If, in the case that Marta had failed, she would not be happy"  
*She did not fail, and the likelihood of her failing was very slim.*

In both examples, Marta had the possibility of failing the test. In (160), it was a realistic possibility. In (161), however, there was a very slim likelihood of her failing the test; failing would have been entirely unexpected.

/noro/ may also affect the tense flexibility of counterfactuals, although this may be related to the idea of past tense removing counterfactuals from reality (Iatridou, 2000). The connection between /noro/ and tense is an area for further study. It is clear, however, that /noro/ adds an additional layer of unreality to counterfactuals.

#### 4.3.5 Hypothetical Questions

Both conditionals and counterfactuals can be used to make hypothetical or rhetorical questions by adding a question suffix /-s/.

- (162) **sara däbbo ma-gaggär bi-t-fällig-äs noro**  
S bread INF-bake CF-3F-want<sub>IPV</sub>-?? IF  
"What if she wants to bake bread?"

- (163) **bi-säbärä-s**  
CF-break<sub>IPV</sub>-S  
"What if it breaks?"

- (164) **bi-säbir-is wänbär-u-n noro**  
CF-break<sub>IPV</sub>-S chair-DEF-OBJ IF  
"What if Negus had broken the chair?"

- (165) **bi-nor-äs**  
CF-live-S  
"What if it exists?"

- (166) **kä-nor-äs**  
 CND-live-S  
 "What if it had existed?"
- (167) **bi-hon-es**  
 CF-become<sub>IPV</sub>-S  
 "What if it happened?"

Hypothetical questions with the counterfactual marker seem less real, and more common for future situations, especially those that the speaker considers desirable. These seem to be a cross between questions and counterfactual wishes. The conditional marker seems more common in open-ended, past tense situations.

#### 4.3.6 Summary of Counterfactuals

The contrary-to-fact implications of the counterfactual is quite strong. Whenever /b-/ is present, there is a very clear implication that the proposition is not true. Often, the speaker wants the situation to be true, or there was an opportunity for the situation to have happened. The counterfactual can be used to construct counterfactual conditionals or single-clause wishes or hypothetical questions.

Tense is somewhat flexible in certain counterfactual constructions, and can have either real tense meaning or serve as an additional operator to remove the counterfactual from the realm of reality.

The antecedent has fixed, fake imperfective aspect. The consequent requires imperfective aspect, just like the plain conditional. There does not appear to be a simple way to add real aspectual meaning to counterfactuals or conditionals, at least not to the antecedent. This means that both constructions are underspecified for aspect.

/noro/ adds an additional layer of unreality to the counterfactual, making it even less likely to be true.

## 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown that P-stems are underspecified for aspect, that I-stems encode imperfective aspect, and that G-stems exist and encode perfect aspect.

I have shown that the prospective /l-/ form marks primarily modal meaning, although it does suggest a future tense reading.

I have also shown that both conditionals and counterfactuals have fixed, fake aspect. Most languages that have fake temporal morphology in counterfactuals have real temporal morphology in conditionals. Amharic, however, has fake aspectual marking in both.

### 5.1 Questions for Further Study

As mentioned in footnote 4, there is an iterative stem that appears to be based on the I-stem, but can take the morphology of any of the stems. Whether the iterative has aspect or is aspectless can shed light on the interaction of aspect-marked stems with other verbal morphology.

Both /noro/ and tense markings have a complex relationship with reality in counterfactuals. Further study could determine the degree to which tense affects counterfactual meaning.

Both plain conditionals and counterfactuals have fake aspectual markings. Previous theories have predicted that conditionals will have real temporal morphology, but counterfactuals will have fake temporal morphology. Why does Amharic have fake aspect in both? Why does the conditional require the underspecified P-stem while the counterfactual requires the imperfective I-stem?

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